

The Library in the 21st Century, 2nd revised ed. Peter Brophy. London: Facet Publishing, 2007. 224p. \$99.95. ISBN 978-1856046060.

In this work Peter Brophy, a respected and prolific author in library and information science, offers a wide-ranging perspective on the current state of the profession. This is the second edition of a book Brophy originally published in 2000. His central conclusion after seven years remains unchanged and (by now) familiar: librarians must reinvent themselves and library services to remain relevant in an electronic age. The clarion call starts on the opening page (which is the reprinted preface from 2000): “I believe in libraries, but I fear for them. They have so much to offer, yet could so easily become backwaters” (pp. ix).

Brophy divides the book into two parts: an examination of library practice as it exists in 2007, and a look at the future of libraries. In Part I he analyses the status of libraries from the viewpoint of various library “sectors” (national libraries, academic libraries, etc., pp. 21-52) and catalogs the policy statements of leading professional associations. Many of Brophy’s examples are from his home country of England, which offers a different perspective for American readers. In this section Brophy also provides a helpful primer about key digital library concepts such as objects, handles, and repositories, and the need to integrate digital services into everyday user workflow.

Part II forms the core of the book; although Part I could stand alone, here it principally sets the stage for Brophy’s reflections on the future of libraries. The longest chapter in

Part II is a catalog of important features of our emerging “information universe”—from tools like XML schema and metadata tags to concepts like open access and Web 2.0 technologies (pp. 163-204). Although probably familiar to some extent for JAL readers, this chapter nevertheless offers a useful summary of a large terrain.

Brophy advances two claims in Part II that seem straightforward at first glance, but become more contestable upon closer inspection. Early in Part II he argues that “user intelligence”—what a librarian knows about individual patron needs and expectations—is essential to distinguishing the library from other sources of information (pp. 127). This is certainly true, but taken to an extreme gathering such intelligence could violate the privacy of users. On the other hand, the popularity of Amazon.com and similar sites seems to indicate that users in any country are willing to forego some privacy in favor of personalized service.

At the very end of the book, after providing a thorough overview of a potential future for digital libraries, Brophy reminds that we not forget the importance of offering excellent service in person: “The danger is that so much attention is paid to virtual services that the need to serve people *in person* becomes neglected” (pp. 211). To the extent that this is true, Brophy is right to raise the alarm. But most librarians I know are still very willing to offer outstanding service to anyone who comes through the doors; we’re just trying to plan for a reality in which many people will not do so.

That disconnect proves a larger point: this book is best suited for students of library and information science, not academic librarians who must grapple with the future of libraries on a daily basis. Brophy offers a comprehensive overview of the state of the field and a detailed vision of its future, and in so doing provides much food for thought.

-Marcus Banks, UC San Francisco Library